

Newsletter: Nurse Alert

Title: Fad Diets-Nutrition Fraud Awareness

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As a public health nutritionist assigned to the Nutrition Fraud Awareness Program, the opportunity to discuss fad diets has come about on many occasions and for a variety of mediums, such as newspapers, talk radio, and public access television. This experience has led to the development of these basic tenets for weight loss schemes:

- 1) Don't fall for promises of miraculous weight loss made by seedy characters in the weight loss industry.
- 2) Be cautious of low carbohydrate diets that may work in the short term, but the long-term health risks are unknown and likely undesirable.
- 3) Stop looking for quick fix solutions for weight loss to get around exercising more and eating less.

Over the last five years, I've seen a number of interesting developments make their mark in fad diet history. Some of these happenings may have made a favorable impact by intercepting deceit and protecting consumers from harm's way. Some are simply repeats of an ongoing story about the gullible seeker of easy, quick weight loss and the happy to oblige profiteer. I hope you find this update useful.

In December 2003 the Federal Trade Commission (the government agency responsible for monitoring deceptive advertising) announced its Red Flag Campaign to help members of the media (such as print, TV, and Internet) identify different types of fraudulent weight loss advertising claims, and hopefully refuse their business. Mock advertisements that depict common ploys provide media (and consumers, although not intended for use by consumers) with comprehensive, yet clear directions for detecting weight loss claims that almost always signal a diet rip-off, www.ftc.gov/redflag.

RED FLAG WEIGHT LOSS CLAIMS THAT ARE TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE:

- Cause weight loss of two pounds or more a week for a month or more without dieting or exercise
- Cause substantial weight loss no matter what or how much the consumer eats
- Cause permanent weight loss even when the consumer stops using the product
- Block the absorption of fat or calories to enable consumers to lose substantial weight
- Safely enables consumers to lose more than three pounds per week for more than four weeks
- Cause substantial weight loss for all users
- Cause substantial weight loss by wearing it on the body or rubbing it on the skin.